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Buddhist Pilgrimage

New Edition 2009

Chan Khoon San

Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati.
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New Cover Design
Inset photo shows the famous Reclining Buddha image at Kusinara. Its unique facial expression evokes the bliss of peace (*santisukha*) of the final liberation as the Buddha passes into *Mahaparinibbana.* Set in the background is the Great Stupa of Sanchi located near Bhopal, an important Buddhist shrine where relics of the Chief Disciples and the Arahants of the Third Buddhist Council were discovered.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the spiritual advisors who accompanied the pilgrimage groups to India from 1991 to 2008. Their guidance and patience, in helping to create a better understanding and appreciation of the significance of the pilgrimage in Buddhism, have made those journeys of faith more meaningful and beneficial to all the pilgrims concerned. They are:

- Sayadaw U Jnanapurnik of Kathmandu, Nepal;

- Sayadaw U Indaka of Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar;

- Venerable B. Saranankara Mahathera of Sentul, Kuala Lumpur;

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- Venerable U Nyanaramsi of Subang Jaya Buddhist Association;

- Sister Uppalavanna of Kathmandu, Nepal.

PREFACE TO NEW EDITION 2009

This is the third edition of ‘‘Buddhist Pilgrimage’ since it was first published in 2002. It comes with a new cover design and contains many new topics and fresh information on several Buddhist sites. An error concerning the religious history of the Matha Kuar shrine in Kushinagar has been rectified. Since 2002, the author has re-visited the Buddhist circuit seven times and travelled to many new Buddhist heritage sites, notably the Ananda *Stupa* in Hajipur; Pava near Kusinara; Lauriya Nandangarh in northern Bihar; Kosambi in Allahabad; Ramagama and Devadaha in Nepal; Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh; the Ajanta Caves in Ajanta; and Diksha Bhumi in Nagpur, Maharashtra. A chance remark he heard about the Buddha’s alms bowl still existing in Afghanistan prompted the author to carry out a research of its whereabouts after the Buddha had donated it to the Licchavis before his *Parinibbana*. The result is a new article entitled ‘The Journey of the Buddha’s Alms Bowl’ in PART III, 5, page 153. Among the colour plates, I have included some rare Buddhist sites in Northern Pakistan. Although the light of *Dhamma* no longer shines in that country, yet it possesses some of the most beautiful Buddhist relics from its glorious past. Sadly, many of them were destroyed by the Talibans who overran the Swat Valley in 2007 e.g. Jehanabad Buddha carved on rock and Gandharan sculptures in Swat Museum.

The idea of a pilgrimage originated from the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago! Before he passed into *Mahaparinibbana*, the Buddha advised pious disciples to visit four holy places the sight of which will arouse faith and religious urgency after He was gone, namely: Lumbini, Buddhagaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. The pious disciple should visit these places and look upon them with feelings of reverence, reflecting on the particular event of the Buddha’s life connected with each place. Since the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha, these four shrines of Buddhism have become the focal points for pious disciples to rally around and seek inspiration. By the time of King Asoka, four more places, namely: Savatthi, Sankasia, Rajagaha and Vesali, that were closely associated with the Buddha and scenes of His principal miracles, were added to the pilgrimage itinerary. Together, they make the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage.

The aim of this book is to share my experience and knowledge with fellow Buddhists about the benefits of undertaking a pilgrimage to the Eight Great Places with the correct mental attitude. In Buddhism, understanding plays the key role in one's spiritual progress. So, for the intending pilgrim, it is imperative to understand that a pilgrimage is essentially a spiritual journey in veneration of the Blessed One. This act of veneration purifies one's thoughts, speech and action and through it, many noble qualities can be developed. Part I of this book discusses these mental aspects. A book on Buddhist Pilgrimage would not be complete without reference to the famous pilgrims of old, namely: King Asoka and the Chinese pilgrims, whose faith and fortitude are an inspiration to all who follow their footsteps. The downfall of Buddhism and the devastation of Buddhist shrines at the end of the 12^{th} century AD followed by six centuries of oblivion, which was the darkest period of Buddhism are retold in this book. Finally, the restoration of the Buddhist shrines and the revival of Buddhism in India are described to enable the reader to appreciate the efforts of the great men who have dedicated their lives to this noble cause. In particular, the invaluable contributions of four great pioneers, namely: Sir Alexander Cunningham, Anagarika Dharmapala, Venerable Sayadaw U Chandramani of Kushinagar and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar are described in their biographies.

Parts II & III of this book trace the history and religious significance of each of the Eight Great Places and the objects of interest that can be found there. Part IV describes other important shrines along the pilgrimage route that pilgrims should also visit if there is sufficient time. A notable example is Sanchi. Although the Buddha did not visit Sanchi, it is a very important Buddhist centre because relics of the Chief Disciples and the Arahants of the Third Buddhist Council responsible for propagating the Buddha Sasana beyond the borders of India were discovered there. In fact, Ven. Mahinda who founded the Buddha *Sasana* in Sri Lanka, stayed one month at Sanchi in a vihara built by his mother Devi, before embarking on his Dhamma mission to the island.

The Third Buddhist Council was held around 250 BC in Pataliputta (Patna). The Most Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was instrumental in convening the Third Council and despatching *Dhamma* missions to

various parts of the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka and Burma to propagate the *Dhamma*. Thanks to his wisdom and foresight, when Buddhism disappeared from India after the Muslim conquest during the twelfth century AD, the light of the *Dhamma* still shone brightly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other Theravada countries where the *Sasana* had been founded. Today we are witnessing a new phenomenon whereby monks from other Buddhist countries are returning to India to revive the Buddha *Sasana* in its country of origin! Pilgrims who stop at Patna should visit the Kumhrar Park, which is believed to be the site of Asokarama, venue of the Third Council.

Interestingly, an account in the Mahavamsa written during the fifth century AD says that the President of the Third Council Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was a Brahma-god named Tissa in his previous existence. At the time of the Second Council, the *Arahants*, foreseeing danger to the religion in the future, approached him for help as his lifespan in the Brahma realm was coming to an end. He consented to be born in the world of men in order to prevent the downfall of the Buddha's religion. Subsequent events appear to confirm the prophecy of the *Arahants* of the Second Council. An account of the life of Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa and his role in spreading the Buddha Sasana to various parts of the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka and Burma is given on Page 148.

Part V of this book provides information on travelling around the Buddhist circuit, road distances, maps showing the locations of the shrines and the pilgrimage groups organized by the author from 1991-2008. A pilgrimage to the Eight Great Places is one of the happiest and most fulfilling moments of one’s life and makes one realize how fortunate it is to be able to travel there and gaze upon these ancient sacred shrines. There is no place on earth that has more powerful and inspiring objects of faith than those one gets to see and worship at the Eight Places of Pilgrimage. In fact, the sights of these holy shrines create such a deep and lasting impact in the mind that the pilgrim will always remember them with joy and reverence for years to come. It is hoped that this book will be useful to intending pilgrims and encourage more Buddhists to undertake the pilgrimage so that they too, can benefit from the journey of piety and faith.

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I am indebted to the following persons who have rendered valuable support to ensure the success of all the pilgrimages to-date, namely:

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- Ven. Saranankara of Sentul (1997)
- Sayadaw U Rewata of Myanmar (1997, 1999, 2001)
- Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma of Myanmar (2002, 2006)
- Sayadaw U Wathawa of Myanmar (2003)
- Sayadaw U Indaka of Myanmar (2004)
- Sayadaw U Pannacara (Myanmar) & Ven. U Nyanaramsi (2006)
- Sayadaw U Kittidhaja of Myanmar (2007)
- Sayadaw U Nyanodaya of Myanmar (2008)

Group Leaders:
- Dr. Wong Wai Cheong, Bro. Tan Boon Chhai and Sis. Flora Tan (1991)
- Bro. Chan Weng Poh, Wong Fok Gee, Yap Pak Choong, Lam Cheok Yew & Sis. Helen Too (1997)
- Bro. Danny Teh Kok Lai, Sis. Wooi Kheng Choo and Kieu Choon Lai (1999)
- Sis. Tan Lei Hong and Bro. Chiu Sheng Bin (2001)
- Bro. Thon Lek, Chan Weng Poh, Cheah Swee Seng and Yong Song Kong (2002)
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FORGIVENESS OF FAULTS

During the two weeks or so of the pilgrimage, it is inevitable for many of the pilgrims, including the author, to lapse into moments of heedlessness and commit faults through body, speech or mind against our spiritual advisors or against our fellow pilgrims. On behalf of all the members concerned, the author takes this opportunity to ask for forgiveness from our spiritual advisors and also from each other. If we had been heedless at the holy shrines, we too seek forgiveness from the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*.

Kāyena vācā cittena – *Pamādena maya katam*
Accayam khama me bhante – *Bhūri-paňňa tathāgata*!
If by deed, speech or thought, heedlessly, we have done wrong, forgive us, O Master! O Teacher Most Wise.

REJOICING AND SHARING OF MERITS

May the merits of this *Dhammadana* be shared with relatives, friends and all beings. May they be well, happy and peaceful! *Sadhu*! *Sadhu*! *Sadhu*!

Chan Khoon San, Klang,
Klang, 1 April 2009

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bro. Chan Khoon San was born on 8 August 1941 in Penang. After completing sixth form, he underwent two years of teacher training at the Malayan Teachers College in Brinsford Lodge, England. On completion of the course, he returned home and taught briefly from 1964 to 1967. In 1968, he entered the University of Malaya and graduated with a B.Sc. (Hons) degree in Chemistry in 1971. From 1971 till retirement in 1996, he worked as a Senior Research Chemist in the oil palm industry.

After retirement Bro Chan went to Myanmar to practice Satipatthana Vipassana meditation under the guidance of **Chanmyay Sayadaw Bhaddanta Janakabhivamsa** at the Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon. Since then he has gone on meditation retreats in Myanmar every year practising under various Vipassana teachers at Chanmyay Yeiktha in Hmawbi. For the rest of the year, he teaches Sutta classes at various Buddhist societies in the Klang Valley.

Bro. Chan has written two well-known books on Buddhism, namely: **'Buddhism Course'** and **'Buddhist Pilgrimage'**. Since 1991, he has organized eleven trips to India visiting the various holy places of Buddhist Pilgrimage. Presently he works as a part-time Consultant Chemist, writes and publishes books and articles on Buddhism.

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